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THE BIBLE IN JAPAN

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The Bible is the foundation of Protestant Christianity. The success, accordingly, of Protestant missions in Japan is bound up with that of the Bible.

The purpose of this paper is to state in briefest terms the influence of this book in Japan.

I. HOW THE BIBLE CAME TO JAPAN

Roman catholic missionaries reached Japan in 1549 A.D. They certainly brought the Latin Bible with them, but in accord with their principles they did not translate it. When, therefore, Christianity was banished from Japan, in 1614 A.D., and some 200,000 native Christians suffered martyrdom, no Christian literature was left. There is good reason for believing, however, that not all knowledge of the Bible was destroyed; for Motoori, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, commenting on the Shinto sacred books, interpreted them in the light of the early chapters of Genesis. How far Christian teaching molded the thought of Japanese moralists of the Tokugawa era (1600-1850) is a literary problem not yet worked out. The one thing certain is that the Japanese government succeeded in utterly destroying all visible evidences of Christianity.

When Japan opened her gates in 1854, she was confronted by a type of Christianity profoundly different in spirit and intellectual content from that which they had expelled two hundred years before. That aimed at the dominance of an ecclesiastical organization. This rested its claims on a book and sought only the dominance of its religious and ethical ideals.

Commodore Perry observed the sabbath and read from his Bible as the Word of God; Townsend Harris failed not to maintain the equanimity of his spirit and persistence of his purpose—carefully keeping the sabbath and religiously reading his Bible.

When, in 1859, Protestant missionaries came to Japan, they

brought the Bible in their right hands, their divine commission for attempting the impossible. Of all the possessions of the missionary, the Bible was that most feared and hated by Japanese officialdom. It was supposed to contain the quintessence of evil, the sacred formulae and the magic charms whereby Christians bewitch people and lead them into all kinds of iniquity. To read the Christian Bible was a crime against the state of the first magnitude.

The first Bible voluntarily read by a Japanese, so far as we know, was a Dutch Testament, found by a nobleman, floating in the harbor of Nagasaki in 1854. With the help of a Chinese translation secretly secured from Shanghai, after many years of secret study and aided by stealthy visits of a retainer at long intervals to Dr. Verbeck the nobleman, with two others, was finally baptized (1866). In the meantime young men, in their zeal to learn English, began studying the English Bible under the guidance of missionaries, and at first were astonished beyond measure to find it a book of such moral insight and purity, with teachings comparable to those of the best parts of Confucius. Responsible leaders of New Japan soon came to the conclusion that Japan had nothing to fear from either Christianity or the Bible. This discovery, added to the insistence of foreign governments that Japan could not be regarded as an equal until the edict against Christianity was removed, led to that momentous change in her national policy. In 1872 the banning-boards were removed throughout the land and preaching soon began based directly on the Bible and its message of God's redeeming love revealed in Jesus Christ. Protestant missionaries early set to work to translate the Bible into the vernacular. The insufficiency of private efforts led, in 1876, to the organization of a representative translation committee. The New Testament was completed and published in 1880 and the Old Testament in 1887.

With the growing popularity of western civilization, during the '80's, Christian preaching and the Bible were much in vogue; New Testaments were bought by the ten thousand, and were looked into more or less. Previous to 1890, the figures giving Bible circulation are incomplete; but it is estimated, from such figures as are available, that about one and one-half million Bibles, New Testaments, and portions were distributed. From July 1890, to January

1909, 101,000 Bibles, 635,000 New Testaments, and 2,844,000 portions were circulated. During the two wars, with China (1894-95) and Russia (1904-5), a large number of the soldiers were provided with single gospels.

II. THE INFLUENCE OF THE BIBLE ON THE ETHICAL AND RELIGIOUS LIFE OF JAPAN

A volume would be needed adequately to treat this theme. Even though measured by the number of members in the Protestant churches (70,000) the influence of the Bible has been truly great. But measured by the changes of moral and religious ideals and practices in the life of the nation effected since the beginning of Protestant work in 1859, the influence is too great to be easily or accurately expressed. It is, of course, impossible to distinguish and separate the influence of the Bible—working by itself—from that of the varied forms of missionary effort and influence, together with the indirect influences exerted by the Christian civilizations of Christendom. But regarding these all as products of the Bible, and also regarding the innumerable Christian influences exerted on Japan by her contact with Christian lands and civilization, through her reading of their literature permeated with Christian ideals, and through Japanese who have traveled or studied in those Christian lands, as also direct or indirect products of the Christian Bible, we cannot avoid the conviction that the whole upward trend, not only in Japan's modern moral and religious life, but also in her efforts at popular education, in her adoption of the principles of religious liberty, civil liberty, equality of personal rights before the law, emphasis on equality of man and woman, the need of female education, and especially the recent emphasis, by conspicuous leaders, on monogamy and the need of purity for men—all these modern modes of life and effort are the direct and indirect results of biblical influence.

Even the renewed vitality of Shinto, Confucian, and Buddhist faiths and their emphasis on the better elements of their own teachings are the effects of biblical influence. Buddhist, Shinto, and Confucian teachers in recent years often quote the Bible, sometimes acknowledging their source, but frequently without such acknowledgment. Many a pithy saying from the Bible is now current coin,

such as, "Man shall not live by bread alone"; "Man lives by the sweat of his brow."

Buddhists especially are making great use of Christian methods. Buddhist Sunday schools and Young Men's Buddhist Associations are common. Buddhist creeds follow the general outlines of Christian creeds. Buddhists have even made selections from their voluminous canonical literature and issued a volume in appearance identical with that of our own Bible.

But we have abundant evidence for the direct and powerful influence of Christianity which is even more impressive. Many a leader in Japanese life has of late confessed his indebtedness to the early missionary and his instruction in the Bible. At the recent Jubilee Conference, celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of Protestant missions in Japan, several striking testimonies of this nature were given, notably by Count Okuma and Bishop Honda. A leading professor in the Imperial University of Tokyo, a professed Buddhist, told the writer recently, that in his view Buddhism holds the doctrine of the personality of the Ultimate Being. When asked if he had not learned that from Christianity and incorporated it into Buddhism, his reply was that his knowledge of Christianity had helped him to find this truth in Buddhism.

I conclude this section with the single observation that the Bible has influenced Japan, because of its intrinsic nature and value, and not because of any theories as to its inspiration, errorlessness, and authority. Missionaries have, indeed, taught these doctrines. But they have not been the ground on which the Bible has exerted its influence. Of the vast multitude who have received from the Bible mighty, though indirect, impulses for good, few have ever given a second thought to the question as to whether or not the Bible is inspired and authoritative in the Christian sense. They only know that the Bible and Christianity have teachings and ideals that appeal to them as good and true, and motives that move them mightily.

III. THE CHRISTIAN BIBLE AND THE "SACRED" BOOKS OF JAPAN

The powerful influence of the Bible in Japan is due in no small measure to the contrasts between it and the so-called "sacred books of the East." We may distinguish three sets, those belonging respec-

tively to the Shinto, Buddhist, and Confucian faiths. Each group comprises an enormous number of works, in style and language unintelligible except to scholars. There are said to be over five thousand volumes in the Buddhist canon. No scholar, even, can read it all. Different sects rest, each on its own preferred sutras, which are regarded as authoritative, while the rest are ignored. Shinto "sacred" books deal chiefly with Japan's mythical history and the ritual of the court religion. The English translation of the oldest of these books is more intelligible to the average Japanese student than is the original. Buddhist literature is predominantly concerned with metaphysics, abstruse in the extreme. Confucian literature is far superior to all the rest in moral interest and quality. It is, however, a religion for scholars only. Its ethical doctrines are expressed in pithy phrases and glittering generalities. The Christian Bible thus has an initial advantage over the other sacred books by reason of its small size, cheap price, and popular language.

As we well know, biblical teaching is concrete and filled with human interest—particularly the gospels and Acts. It is in a language easily intelligible to the ordinary mind. It, too, needs interpretation and exposition at the beginning; but once the door to its main ideas of God and man, of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, of sin and salvation has been opened—which is not so difficult an operation—the mind easily grasps the rich stores of spiritual wealth. The Bible is profoundly and always ethical and religious. Its ideas are at bottom simple and in accord with experience, yet grand, elevating, inspiring. They are fitted, as experience shows, to the uneducated, and to children, no less than to scholars and philosophers. In each of these points the Christian Scriptures far surpass rival literatures. And then, too, the Bible brings light into the chaos of life, gives meaning to the world, existence, and self, and hope of final victory and joy and peace. In none of these respects do the others compare with the Bible. Thus it is coming to pass that the Bible is read and is influencing modern life in Japan far and wide.

IV. THE DOCTRINES OF THE INSPIRATION, ERRORLESSNESS, AND AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

When the missionaries began to teach the Bible, they naturally emphasized these doctrines. And many still do. Such emphasis

was no doubt a help. When trust in the goodness and truthfulness of the missionaries, as men, began to develop, it was no doubt a help to their proclamation of the gospel for them to be able to say that in this little book they possessed absolute truth, the very word of God to men. The personal character of the missionaries was the ground on which the Japanese were first led to look into and study a book of which they were naturally mortally afraid. As they studied and read the portions selected by the missionaries, they found not only teachings intrinsically good and true, but commands that required Christians to proclaim the gospel to all the world. The Bible thus became the authority for the missionary—the authority for his message and work and the explanation of his amazing courage and zeal. The Bible words and missionary character were thus mutual supports, mutual guarantees. The claim, too, of Bible inspiration was an incentive to young students to study and to mold their lives on biblical models, to take the Bible at its word.

Now, these doctrines worked well so long as the young Christians were acquainted only with the New Testament and Psalms and sections from the Prophets, and so long as the Christian community was unacquainted with modern critical scholarship. When, however, higher criticism came to Japan, with the arrival of Unitarian missionaries from Boston (1887), and German missionaries from Berlin (1888), a great revulsion took place—questions were asked, loss of faith was experienced both in the missionaries and in the Bible. The critical questions which vexed the church at home came to Japan with especially destructive force, due to the slight religious experience of the Christians, most of whom were young men with their corresponding lack of experimental foundations for faith.

Only a slight examination of the abundant materials put into their hands by Biblical critics and vociferous haters of Christianity demolished completely the theory of the errorlessness of the Bible. Its collision with modern science was a matter not difficult to prove, for the doctrines of materialistic evolution were widely proclaimed in the '80's. Portions of Spencer's *Synthetic Philosophy* were early translated. Under such circumstances the traditional doctrines of supernatural revelation, inspiration, errorlessness, and authority were generally abandoned even by pastors.

To develop afresh among educated Japanese Christians, faith in the inspiration and authority of the Bible it has become as necessary here as it is in other progressive communities to concentrate emphasis on essentials. The Bible must be taught, not as a miraculously given, errorless revelation of supernatural truth, equally authoritative in all its parts, but as a record of a progressive revelation of God's redemptive love culminating in Jesus Christ by whose mind and character as depicted in the gospels we judge all other portions. It has become necessary to rest our case for the inspiration and authority of the Bible, not on its verbal accuracy, the correctness of its scientific statements, or its freedom from historical errors, but rather on its intrinsic religious and ethical power. We need only to show that the Bible throws real light on man's deepest problems, religious, moral, and even intellectual, that it brings the universe into a new perspective, causes it to glow with a new light, and enables sinful men to find a loving, redeeming Father and gives them continuous power to battle with doubt and temptation. Experience of this power in the Bible brings conviction of its inspiration and authority such as can be given by no abstract, merely logical proof. Such are the grounds on which the doctrines of inspiration and authority are being taught by many missionaries and by nearly all Japanese pastors. When thus taught the Bible gains and holds the minds and hearts of the strongest and most highly educated men.

The Bible is coming to be recognized as the unique religious book of the world, fitted to nourish religious life in every land. It is in truth the one universal religious book just because it has this power to bring men face to face with God. No other "sacred" book of any race or religion has such power as this. This power is obscured by the older conception of the Bible as an errorless book given miraculously and possessed of a corresponding supernatural truth and authority. This modern and now rapidly becoming orthodox view of the Bible disarms hostile critics, turns discussion into fruitful lines, and gives opportunity for the Bible to exert its true influence and attain its rightful place in the lives of men. This it is doing more and more, and we have every reason to believe that in due season the Bible will become the one universally acknowledged sacred book of Japan.